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## Aids to Bible Readers.<sup>1</sup>

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### THE BOOK OF ACTS.

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*A unique book—Evidence of authorship—Purpose and method; various views; view suggested by the Gospel—Analysis.*

THE book of Acts is the one narrative book of the New Testament which treats of the history of the apostolic age. While for the evangelic period of New Testament history, the Life of Christ, we have four narratives, for the apostolic period we have but one, the book of Acts. The twenty-one epistles of the New Testament, contain indeed most valuable information concerning the apostolic age, and even the gospels and the Revelation, by the reflection which they give of the time in which they were written, add something to our knowledge of this earliest period of the history of the Christian church. Yet the book of Acts stands alone as the only book that gives a connected narrative of its events.

This book is, like all the gospels, unlike most of the epistles, anonymous. No author's name stands on its title page or is signed to its preface. The writer does, however, describe himself as the author of another work, a book concerning the deeds and teachings of Jesus, and there is no doubt that the book thus referred to is our Third Gospel.

The use of the pronoun *we* in portions of the latter part of Acts (see 16:10-18; 20:5-16; 21:1-18; 27:1—28:16) constitutes an unobtrusive but real claim that these portions at least were written by a traveling companion of Paul. Tradition, undisputed in ancient times, and so uniform as to be almost as valuable as a name on a title-page, affirms that this companion of Paul was Luke, undoubtedly referring to the one mentioned in Col. 4:14, and ascribes to him the whole of both books, the Gospel and the Acts.

<sup>1</sup>Under this head will be published from month to month articles intended to furnish help in the intelligent *reading* of the books of the Bible *as books*. They will aim to present not so much fresh results of critical investigation as well established and generally recognized conclusions.

What the plan of the book of Acts is, and on what principle of selection the author included or excluded material, has been much discussed. It is evident that the book does not give a complete or even a symmetrical account of the events that made up the history of the apostolic church. Nor is it a history of the apostles. Most of the apostles appear only in the list of names in 1:13, and several men who are not apostles are somewhat prominent. But neither is it a history of any one or two apostles. The last part of the book, from chapter 13 on, is indeed devoted to the labors of Paul and his companions, while Peter is specially prominent in the first twelve chapters. But Peter is not the only person whose deeds are related in these earlier chapters, nor do all the others whose deeds are told appear as his companions or helpers. Stephen and Philip and Saul himself are brought prominently forward, though they stand in no special relation to Peter. The progress of the gospel from Jerusalem to Rome has been suggested as the theme of the book, and there is truth in this suggestion. For the book certainly conveys the impression that the author conceived the events which he narrated as exhibiting that outward movement of the gospel from Jerusalem as a center, that development of its power and expansion of its territory, by which the Christianity that sprung from a narrow and exclusive Judaism demonstrated its fitness and its power to become the religion of the world. Yet not even this conception of his plan will quite account for all the material which the author has included. This may have been the idea which impelled him to write, but if so it was not altogether dominant in determining the selection of his material.

In the preface to his Gospel (Luke 1:1-4) the author says that he wrote after careful investigation, and with the purpose of furnishing his readers a wholly trustworthy account of the gospel history, an historical basis for faith. He implies that he was not himself an eyewitness of the events which he narrates, but that he based his work upon the testimony of those who were such. Is it not natural to suppose that the general purpose and general method of the second volume were the same as those of the first? As there his object was to furnish a foundation for faith by giving a trustworthy account of the life of Christ, so here it is to confirm faith by showing the progress and triumphs of the gospel as under the guidance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit the apostles and their associates preached in land after land. As there he employed the testimony of eyewitnesses, so here also; only that here, as appears from the "we-passages," of an impor-

tant portion of the events which he has to relate, he is himself the eye-witness.

The character of the book is, to say the least, consistent with this view of its purpose and method. It is natural to think that a book so admirably adapted to supplement the evangelic narrative, and to confirm the faith of its readers in the gospel as the divine message to all nations, was written for the purpose of producing this result. And as respects the principle of selection followed by the author, the view here presented that he employed such testimony of eyewitnesses as was accessible to him, including, of course, his own direct knowledge, is certainly favored by one noteworthy fact. If from the book itself we make a list of the places which, by the unobtrusive use of the pronoun *we*, the writer implies that he had visited with Paul, it will appear that for each event related by him of which he was not himself an eye-witness it is possible to point to a particular occasion on which he either visited the place where the event is said to have occurred (and hence may easily have come in contact with those who could give first-hand testimony) or met the persons of whom the events are narrated.

If this *prima facie* view of the purpose of the book and its principle of selection is the true one, we may undertake the reading of the book as being the narrative of a man who was a companion of Paul on a portion of his missionary journeys, and who, having witnessed many events connected with the establishment and extension of the Christian church in the apostolic age, and having in the course of his travels had opportunity to learn of many other events from those who themselves participated in them or knew of them at first hand, undertook to write, in chronological order as far as he was able, the most interesting and important of the things which he had witnessed or learned, and which tended to show that the gospel was adapted and destined to become — was, indeed, already becoming — the religion for all nations.

The following analysis is intended as an aid in the reading of the book, and of the study of it as a book.

#### ANALYSIS.

I. **PART FIRST. THE EARLY ANNALS OF THE CHURCH IN JERUSALEM, AND THE BEGINNINGS OF CHRISTIANITY IN SYRIA.** Jerusalem is throughout this period the center of interest and influence. The Church is almost wholly confined within the limits of Judaism. Only the beginnings of larger things as

yet appear, and no organized effort to reach the Gentiles is recorded. The work of various persons is described, the apostle Peter being the most prominent. The writer does not represent himself as an eyewitness of any of the events of this part of the book. Chaps. 1-12.

**A. THE EARLY DAYS OF THE CHURCH IN JERUSALEM.** Chaps. 1-7.

1. Waiting for the coming of the Spirit. Chap. 1.  
  - a. The promise of the Spirit and the ascension of Jesus. 1:1-14.
  - b. The choosing of Matthias. 1:15-26.
2. The great day of Pentecost. Chap. 2.  
  - a. The coming of the Spirit, and the gift of tongues. 2:1-13.
  - b. Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost. 2:14-36.
  - c. The conversion of the three thousand. 2:37-42.
  - d. The church in peace and favor. 2:43-47.
3. The growth of the church in Jerusalem in numbers and strength Chaps. 3-5.  
  - a. The healing of the lame man by Peter and John. 3:1-10.
  - b. Peter's sermon in Solomon's porch. 3:11-26.
  - c. The first imprisonment of Peter and John. 4:1-31.
  - d. The unity of the church and the community of goods. 4:32-37.
  - e. Ananias and Sapphira. 5:1-11.
  - f. Signs and wonders wrought by the apostle. 5:12-16.
  - g. The second imprisonment of the apostle. 5:17-42.
4. The choosing of the seven and the martyrdom of Stephen. 6:1-8:1a.  
  - a. The choosing of the seven to serve tables. 6:1-7.
  - b. The trial and death of Stephen the martyr. 6:8-8:1a.

**B. THE CHURCH SCATTERED ABROAD AND PREACHING THE WORD.** This is a transition period; the church scattered by persecution carries the gospel where it goes; and other providential circumstances prepare the way for a larger work. Chaps. 8-12.

1. The church scattered by persecution. 8:1b-3.
2. The work of Philip the evangelist. 8:4-40.  
  - a. The preaching of the gospel in the city of Samaria. 8:4-25.
  - b. Philip and the Ethiopian treasurer. 8:26-40.
3. The early Christian life of Saul. 9:1-31.  
  - a. His conversion. 9:1-19a.
  - b. Preaching in Damascus. 9:19b-25.
  - c. His first visit to Jerusalem after his conversion. 9:26-31.
4. Peter in Lydda, Joppa, and Cæsarea. 9:32-11:18.  
  - a. The healing of Æneas. 9:32-35.
  - b. The raising of Dorcas to life. 9:36-43.

- c. Peter's visit to Cornelius. Chap. 10.
- d. Peter's defense of his action in respect to Cornelius. 11:1-18.
- 5. The early days of the church in Antioch and contemporary events in Jerusalem. 11:19-12:25.
  - a. The beginning of the gospel in Antioch. 11:19-26.
  - b. Relief sent from Antioch to Jerusalem by the hand of Barnabas and Saul. 11:27-30.
  - c. Persecution of the church in Jerusalem by Herod. 12:1-24.
  - d. Return of Barnabas and Saul to Antioch. 12:25.

**II. PART SECOND. THE MISSIONARY LABORS OF PAUL AND HIS COMPANIONS.** This second part of the book is more homogeneous than the first. It deals almost exclusively with the work of Paul and his companions in preaching the gospel in gentile lands. The gospel is no longer confined within Jewish bounds, but is preached to all nations. The events are connected together in a continuous narrative, and the writer relates in considerable part things of which he was an eyewitness.

- 1. Paul's first missionary journey. Chaps. 13, 14.
  - a. Barnabas and Saul sent forth. 13:1-3.
  - b. Preaching the word at Salamis and Paphos. 13:4-12.
  - c. At Pisidian Antioch. 13:13-52.
  - d. At Iconium. 14:1-7.
  - e. At Lystra and Derbe, and the return to Antioch in Syria. 14:8-28.
- 2. Paul's second sojourn at Antioch and the council at Jerusalem. 15:1-35.
  - a. The council at Jerusalem. 15:1-29.
  - b. Report of the council's action to the church at Antioch. 15:30-36.
- 3. Paul's second missionary journey. 15:36-18:22
  - a. The dissension between Paul and Barnabas, and the revisiting of the churches in Syria and Cilicia. 15:36-41.
  - b. The churches in southern Asia Minor revisited. 16:1-5.
  - c. The journey to Troas and the vision of Paul. 16:6-10.
  - d. The beginning of the Gospel in Philippi. 16:11-40.
  - e. Paul and Silas at Thessalonica. 17:1-9.
  - f. Paul and Silas at Berœa. 17:10-17.
  - g. Paul at Athens. 17:18-34.
  - h. Paul's ministry of eighteen months at Corinth. 18:1-17.
  - i. Paul's return to Syria, and third sojourn at Antioch. 18:18-22.
- 4. Paul's third missionary journey. 18:23-21:16.
  - a. Paul again visits the churches in the Galatian region and Phrygia. 18:23.
  - b. Apollos in Ephesus and Corinth. 18:24-28.

c. Paul's three years' ministry in Ephesus.	Chap. 19.
d. From Ephesus to Macedonia and Greece.	20:1, 2.
e. From Greece to Jerusalem.	20:4—21:16.
5. Paul's last visit to Jerusalem.	21:17—23:35.
a. Paul's reception by the church in Jerusalem.	21:17—26.
b. His arrest in Jerusalem.	21:27—36.
c. His address to the people in the Hebrew language.	21:37—22:29.
d. His address before the council.	22:30—23:11.
e. The plot of the Jews against him and his removal to Cæsarea.	23:12—35.
6. Paul's two years' imprisonment in Cæsarea.	Chaps. 24—26.
a. Paul's examination before Felix.	24:1—23.
b. Before Felix and Drusilla.	24:24—27.
c. His examination before Festus, and appeal to Cæsar.	25:1—12.
d. Before Agrippa and Bernice.	25:13—26:32.
7. The voyage to Rome.	27:1—28:15.
a. From Cæsarea to Fair Havens.	27:1—8.
b. The storm and the shipwreck.	27:9—44.
c. On the island of Melita.	28:1—10.
d. From Melita to Rome.	28:11—15.
8. Paul's two years' imprisonment in Rome.	28:16—28.